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Joint Inspection Unit

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Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with article 9, paragraph 2, of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit, the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the General Assembly the programme of work of the Joint Inspection Unit for 2004.

* A/59/50 and Corr.1.

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Programme of work of the Joint Inspection Unit for 2004

I. Introduction

1. The following programme of work has been drawn up in accordance with the provisions of article 9, paragraph 1, of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), contained in the annex to General Assembly resolution 31/192 of 22 December 1976. It takes into account the guidelines laid out in successive Assembly resolutions, in particular resolutions 50/233 of 7 June 1996, 54/16 of 29 October 1999, 56/245 of 24 December 2001 and 57/284 A of 20 December 2002. As in the past, the programme of work of the Unit is flexible and may be modified throughout the year, if circumstances warrant it.

2. In accordance with its statute, JIU considers themes that emanate from the governing bodies of the participating organizations, from suggestions made by the secretariats of the participating organizations and from ideas that come from within the Unit. The Unit reviewed 22 themes for possible inclusion in the 2004 work programme. Of these, three were requested by governing bodies, 17 were suggested by the secretariats and two were ideas emanating from within the Unit.

II. Methodology for the selection of themes

3. In devising the methodology to select themes for the programme of work for 2004, a series of processes and new tools were developed, with a view to ensuring that it would contain themes that: are high on the agenda of the United Nations system and/or its various governing bodies; have the potential to improve the way the United Nations system delivers programmes or services; are system-wide in scope; can lead to improved efficiency and/or potential savings; and, where possible, are synergetic with other reports of JIU, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) or other internal oversight bodies and/or the Board of Auditors, while avoiding duplication of effort.

4. In order to achieve this, a validation check list, based on the strategic framework approved by the Unit, was introduced. All proposals for the inclusion of themes were tested against this tool. Additionally, a set of clear and objective selection criteria was adopted by the Unit; all the proposals were rated on this basis by each inspector and then subjected to the "collective wisdom" of the Unit.

III. Programme of work for 2004

A. System-wide issues

Administration of justice in the United Nations system — harmonization of the statutes of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal and the Administrative Tribunal of the International Labour Organization

5. For a number of years, the General Assembly has been expressing its concern that the present system of administration of justice at the United Nations is slow, cumbersome and costly. In response, JIU has submitted three reports on the issue (A/41/640, A/55/57 and A/57/441). Most recently, in its resolution 57/307 of

15 April 2003, the Assembly noted that the staff of the secretariats of the United Nations, the funds and programmes and the specialized agencies were subject to two different systems of administration of justice. The Assembly requested the Unit to continue to study the possibility of harmonizing the statutes of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal and the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal, bearing in mind the information contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the administration of justice in the Secretariat (A/56/800, paras. 39-42), for consideration by the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session.

6. The objective of the study will be to assess the feasibility of a further harmonization of the statutes of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal and the International Labour Organization Administrative Tribunal and, where appropriate, to propose different viable options, for example the unification of the two Tribunals or the establishment of a new single administrative tribunal for the entire common system.

Review of current inter-agency coordinating mechanisms

7. The coordination of the activities of the United Nations, its funds and programmes and the specialized agencies, with the objective of making optimal use of available resources, continues to be a prime concern of both the Member States and the secretariats of the organizations of the common system. This concern has led to the establishment of inter-agency coordinating mechanisms. Periodically, these mechanisms have been subject to review, including three reports by JIU since 1996.[1]

8. As part of ongoing reform efforts led by the secretariats, in 1997 the Secretary-General established the United Nations Development Group. Subsequently, in 2001, the then Administrative Committee on Coordination was restructured and renamed the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). Although they have different memberships, since the work of both bodies involves the promotion of system-wide coordination, questions have been raised as to the possible overlapping of their functions.

9. As a follow-up to its earlier reports, and bearing in mind that there is now a common global framework for action, as embodied in major conferences and action plans, but most importantly in the Millennium Declaration, to which all United Nations system organizations (including the Bretton Woods institutions) have pledged their support, the JIU believes it would be timely to revisit current inter-agency coordinating mechanisms with a view to evaluating their practical efficiency. The Unit has therefore decided to accept the proposal of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) that the review be included in the programme of work for 2004. The Unit will examine the functions of these mechanisms, evaluate their structures and assess their performance and relationships in respect of their overall coordinating role.

Enhancing collaboration and coordination among United Nations agencies in Africa

10. The inclusion of the above item in JIU programme of work for 2004 derives from a proposal of the Economic Commission for Africa. Despite repeated efforts over a period of years, and contrary to the spirit of Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46 on further measures for the restructuring and revitalization of the United Nations in the economic, social and related fields, notable shortcomings still

characterize coordination arrangements in Africa. In particular, more needs to be done to take full advantage of the collaborative potential offered by the annual regional consultative meetings in Africa to avoid duplication, overlapping and waste. Regional consultations must be made more functional, focused and coherent, particularly in the light of their role in support of the priorities of the New Partnership for Africa's Development and the Millennium Development Goals.

11. The primary objective of the proposed study will therefore be to examine the existing institutional framework and/or arrangements for coordination among the United Nations agencies operating in Africa, with the aim of enhancing their effectiveness, complementarity, cost-effectiveness and impact in implementing their mandated programmes and activities.

12. The study will take into account the linkages among the three levels where coordination takes place, namely the regional, subregional and country levels. The nature and scope of the study also presents an opportunity to examine the role of the subregional offices of the Economic Commission for Africa in strengthening collaboration at the subregional level, as well as the relationship between the Commission and other African regional and subregional organizations, including the African Union and the African Development Bank.

Feasibility of developing a common payroll service for the United Nations common system

13. Most organizations have developed and maintain their own computerized payroll systems, in some cases as part of their management information systems. It is estimated that currently there are more than 15 computerized payroll systems in use in the various United Nations system organizations. Experience has shown that significant costs are associated with the development and maintenance of a computerized payroll system. In view of the rapid changes in technology, operational systems can be rendered inefficient, and therefore obsolete, within a few years. Considering that the life cycle of a computerized system is about a decade, the significant costs associated with the development of a state-of-the-art system must be incurred approximately every 10 years. Considering also the additional cost of maintaining the system until it is replaced by a new one, Member States are faced with expenses associated with paying staff that may be estimated to run into millions of dollars a year.

14. Expanding and strengthening common services was one of eight strategies proposed for the enhancement of support capacities by the Secretary-General, as set out in his letter on management and organizational measures in his first programme for reform (A/51/829). The study, following on other JIU studies on United Nations system common services,[2] is designed to determine whether a common payroll system can be developed and administered by an independent entity. The expected outcome, or result, would be: significant savings in operating costs annually; providing better service to staff; and eliminating duplication and attendant waste. In addition, it could serve as a deterrent against deviations from the common system of salaries and allowances and therefore serve to strengthen the common system.

Review of the management of United Nations laissez-passer

15. The Convention on Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations stipulates that United Nations laissez-passer shall be recognized and accepted as valid travel

documents by the authorities of Member States.[3] A similar article is contained in the Convention on Privileges and Immunities of the Specialized Agencies.[4] United Nations laissez-passer are essential for staff members to perform their duties, in particular when they travel on mission.

16. The Secretariat issues laissez-passer for almost all organizations of the United Nations system at three duty stations: New York, Geneva and Vienna. In 2002, the OIOS conducted an audit of the management of laissez-passer by the Secretariat and identified a number of problems and administrative weaknesses. Many of these issues, given their system-wide nature, are in all probability not restricted solely to the United Nations. Thus, JIU decided to undertake a follow-up report and extend the review to other organizations of the United Nations system.

17. The objective of the study is twofold: (a) to assist organizations of the United Nations system in establishing clear policies concerning the issuing, controlling and cancelling of laissez-passer; and (b) to reduce the risk of misuse or loss of laissez-passer and contribute to enhanced security within and beyond the United Nations system.

Open source software

18. The use of open source software (OSS) has been the subject of many studies in the past few years. In these studies, OSS is also referred to as free and open source software (FOSS) or free/libre and open source software (FLOSS). High reliability, low cost and better security are among some of the attractive features of OSS that have prompted Governments, both from developed and developing countries, to adopt new policies promoting and even to mandate its use by their respective public administrations. In addition, the proponents of such software consider that its use can greatly contribute to support policies on information and communication technologies for development (ICTD).

19. As many United Nations system organizations have adopted or are about to adopt information and communications technology (ICT) strategies, the proposed study by JIU intends to review policies and practices of system organizations vis-à-vis the use of OSS, focusing mainly on: (a) its use as a management tool and its comparative advantages, and constraints, in relation to proprietary software; (b) the extent to which its use in the framework of ICTD policies could foster the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals as well as the implementation of the Plan of Action approved in 2003 by the World Summit on the Information Society; and (c) the contribution of United Nations system organizations and related coordination requirements.

B. Management and administration reviews

20. Within the context of its series of reviews of the management and administration of United Nations funds, programmes and agencies, the Joint Inspection Unit has agreed to include in its programme of work the reports/notes described below.

Review of management and administration at the Pan-American Health Organization

21. Following a request from the Regional Director for the Americas of the World Health Organization (WHO), the WHO secretariat suggested that JIU include in its 2004 programme of work a review of management and administration in its Americas Regional Office (AMRO)/Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO), AMRO/PAHO, along the lines of the Unit's earlier review of management and administration at WHO.

22. The objective of the report is to provide guidance on ways to: (a) further rationalize the delivery of technical cooperation to the AMRO/PAHO Member Governments, including special efforts to further decentralize the technical cooperation process; (b) improve management and administrative practices; (c) ensure effective working relationships among AMRO/PAHO's various organizational levels and units, including the sharing of best practices; and (d) ensure a higher level of organizational effectiveness.

23. JIU is currently finalizing a series of reviews of the status of implementation of results-based management in the United Nations system and of human resources management reforms, with a view to designing a benchmarking framework to be used by the organizations of the common system. In reviewing the management and administration of AMRO/PAHO, JIU intends to apply this benchmarking framework as a case study, based on its previous experience in similar exercises.

Review of the management, administration and activities of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification

24. By its decision 23/COP.6, adopted at the sixth session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, the parties to the Convention requested JIU to undertake a comprehensive review of the activities of the Convention's secretariat. The parties further requested the Bureau of Conference of the Parties to develop terms of reference, for review by June 2004, based on the following guidelines: (a) the coherence and implementation of the decisions of the Conference of the Parties relevant to the secretariat; (b) the structural implications of the evolving role of the secretariat; (c) the appropriate division of labour and responsibilities between the secretariat and the Global Mechanism; and (d) how further improvements in the budget presentation could increase transparency and assist the Conference of the Parties in its deliberations thereon. The proposed review is to be submitted for consideration at the seventh session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, scheduled for the autumn of 2005.

25. As is the case for AMRO/PAHO, the Unit intends to apply to this review the benchmarking framework it is presently developing in the field of results-based management and human resources management.

Review of management and administration in the United Nations Office at Geneva

26. JIU decided to resume its review of the management and administration in the United Nations Office at Geneva, which was deferred from 2003. The objective is to examine the structure of the Office as well as its management and administration practices, with a view to recommending concrete measures to improve its cost-effectiveness. The study will provide an assessment of the capacity of the Office as a potential provider of additional common services to the organizations of the United

Nations system based in Geneva. It will also review the quality of the services provided by the Office to other United Nations offices in Geneva, with a view to improving these services and making them more cost-effective. There will be an inspection of outsourcing practices with the aim of exploring further possibilities in this area. The report will also consider issues arising from the degree of delegation of authority to the United Nations Office at Geneva. It will build on an earlier report of the Unit, which reviewed United Nations system common services at Geneva (A/53/787), by focusing on the potential for enhancement of the current role and performance of the United Nations Office at Geneva.

C. Notes

Note on knowledge management for the International Labour Organization

27. As part of its programme of work for 2004, JIU is undertaking a report on knowledge management. The International Labour Office has suggested that the Unit provide it with advance information on this subject, tailored to its specific needs, as it will be preparing a paper for the forthcoming session of the Governing Body. JIU has agreed to provide a note in this respect.

28. As in previous years, after a thorough review and subject to the availability of time, additional notes and confidential letters may be issued in response to suggestions received from the secretariats of the participating organizations.

Notes

[1] "Coordination of policy and programming frameworks for more effective development cooperation" (JIU/REP/96/3; A/51/636), "Strengthening field representation of the United Nations system" (JIU/REP/97/1; A/52/457) and "Review of the Joint Inspection Unit on the review of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and its machinery" (JIU/REP/99/1; A/54/288).

[2] JIU/REP/98/4, JIU/REP/2000/5, JIU/REP/2002/12.

[3] Resolution 22 A (I), article VII.

[4] United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 33, No. 521.